

## **Bad at Words by GrifficScribbles**

**Category:** Stranger Things (TV 2016)

**Genre:** Alternate Universe - Canon Divergence, Angst, Autistic Jonathan Byers, Bilingual Character(s), Billy Hargrove Speaks Spanish, Bisexual Nancy Wheeler, Bisexual Steve Harrington, Bisexual Tommy Hagan, Dyslexic Steve Harrington, F/F, F/M, Fluff, Fluff and Angst, Gay Billy Hargrove, Gay Jonathan Byers, Good Friend Robin Buckley, Good Parent Joyce Byers, Good friend Heather Holloway, I Wrote This Instead of Sleeping, I'm Bad At Summaries, I'm Bad At Tagging, Italian Steve Harrington, Jonathan Byers uses ASL, M/M, Other Additional Tags to Be Added, Period Typical Attitudes, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder - PTSD, Rating May Change, Self-Indulgent, Soccer Mom Steve Harrington, Steve Harrington Has Bad Parents, Steve Harrington Has Panic Attacks, Tags May Change, Tommy Hagan gets redeemed

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Heather Holloway, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Jonathan Byers, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Mike Wheeler, Nancy Wheeler, Robin Buckley, Steve Harrington, Steve Harrington's Grandmother, The Party (Stranger Things), Tommy Hagan, Will Byers

**Relationships:** Billy Hargrove & Heather Holloway, Billy Hargrove & Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington, Eleven | Jane Hopper/Maxine "Max" Mayfield, Jonathan Byers & Nancy Wheeler, Jonathan Byers & Will Byers, Jonathan Byers/Billy Hargrove, Jonathan Byers/Billy Hargrove/Steve Harrington, Jonathan Byers/Steve Harrington, Robin Buckley & Steve Harrington, Robin Buckley/Heather Holloway, Steve Harrington & Dustin Henderson, Steve Harrington & The Party, Will Byers/Dustin Henderson

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**Summary:**

Steve Harrington is half Italian. His mom doesn't like speaking her mother tongue because America is the land of racists. The only times Steve could speak it was with his grandmother, his Nonna. Now he's all alone, and his Italian's suffered from disuse. But maybe he's not as alone as he thinks he is.

Previously titled "Bi Bi Bi"

## 1. Rumori circostanti

### Author's Note:

This is Steve's POV of the events in "I don't Understand" and "Bad at Being Human" please bear with me, and thank you for reading.

Monday, the first day of school after winter break, the first day of school since turning 19. Steve gets out of bed and puts a random record on the player. It's *The Magic Flute*, sorta dark and sorta annoying when the Queen sings, but Nonna had always listened to opera first thing in the morning, and it's just sorta . . stuck. After placing the needle down, he goes back to his room and picks a random shirt to style an outfit around. No one has to know that his clothes are highly organized for this exact purpose. After that he checks to make sure he's got all the notes he needs and has a breakfast of a fried egg on toast. The clock says 6:45 when he gets into the car, and turns on the radio to listen to something more modern on the way to school. It's a jarring change, but that's the point, he wakes up and acts like he's still loved, and when he gets in his car to face the world, the world faces him back. That's how the saying goes right?

School doesn't start for a while, but he likes to leave early so he has extra time in case Dustin needs a lift to the middle school, and so he can make any last minute changes to the homework that he needs to. Dustin doesn't need a ride today, so Steve has plenty of time to finish a couple songs in the parking lot, snag his early morning table, and glare daggers at the math homework. It was late going into break and Mr. Carter said he'd still accept it on the first day back. He'd forgotten about it but now he was thankful that he finished a good number of problems in study hall the day it was late. The trouble is that he doesn't remember if there was a specific formula to use, and looking at the previous answers wasn't helping. He stared at the next empty space, frowning as numbers seemed to disappear and come back, or scramble themselves just so to give him a headache. He closes his eyes for a moment and manages to power through two questions

before he snaps. He's not a patient man.

"Fanculo questo, fanculo matematica," He grumbles under his breath, almost as if threatening the page, before collecting his things and going to Homeroom. Mrs. Stratton was kind enough not to put him next to Tommy Hagan, but Steve is still able to feel the other boy when he looks at him and snickers. He's starting to become a master of tuning out when Tommy's presence gets known. Billy Hargrove's also in this class, but he doesn't seem to be paying attention to him, so at least this morning won't start with a bad attitude. He hasn't completely forgiven Billy for the concussion, but he's not going to bring it up, Billy hasn't and it's almost like a truce. Almost, he's still a dick that likes to push his buttons. After Homeroom comes Math, and Steve holds his head high turning in the assignment that's still blank for the last three or four questions. He takes his seat and prepares for hell. Monsters from another dimension were only just above these days in Geometry. It isn't his worst class, but it's still not good by any means. It feels like it takes forever, and he's one of the only Seniors there, he had hated algebra and avoided taking his second year of math until he couldn't anymore. The good news is that he wasn't picked on, the younger students didn't care and the couple other seniors pretended like they weren't in this class. Jonathan was in this class, and it felt good to have a friend to share the numerical torment with.

After the bell finally rang, He stops by his locker to get his English books before heading to Study Hall, which is a breeze. He works on some of the math problems Carter has assigned, then goes over his notes for English. It's gotten even harder after Nancy left but he can talk to her during lunch if he has any trouble. He's thankful she's still willing to help him, even though she can be a bit harsh in her critiques. English is her passion, and she wants to get into writing about important issues, so Steve lets it slide and considers it as helping her with her career path. Lunch itself is pretty uneventful, though Billy is sitting by himself at one of the center tables, and life goes on. Nancy does her best to explain why Hamlet doesn't immediately reveal his Uncle to the court and bites his tongue about

how royal succession actually works.

He takes diligent notes in English, repeatedly thinking "*rallenta strega! Sto cercando di scrivi!...wait that's not right. Shit,*" and Ms. Little continuing on at the same pace as before. It's hard enough that she never seems to breathe while she's talking, but the letters on the pages they're supposed to read don't look right. He's heard that the letters are supposed to come off the page and dance in your face like you're a schizophrenic, but he doesn't. His letters do a little dance, sometimes hiding, or switching into something else, and the worst part is, not all of them do, it's made reading for fun a real pain in the ass and reading for school a trial. It shouldn't be a surprise that English was his worst subject, given that. Gym comes afterwards and it's a welcome breath of fresh air, they're just doing simple games, and Billy's ego seems content enough that it's almost possible to forget he's there. He decides not to try and test his patience and rolls with it, it's not every day that you get to just exist without some snark. He hits the showers before changing and heading home, the kids are biking over to the Wheeler's to hang out so it's just him and David Bowie on the radio.

At home there's an uneasy silence, and it's almost like the inverse of the high school. There Steve is deafened by bells and lockers and chatter, here he's deafened by a lack of life, it's a pet cage masquerading as a home. If Steve turns on all the lights in the house and plays Swan Lake then who can judge him, it's his cage after all.

Tuesday starts the same, wake up because of a nightmare, pretend to sleep until six, get up, get ready, have barely a breakfast before driving off. He ate the last of the eggs yesterday, and he's running low on milk, so he needs to go to the store soon. Today he stops by the Henderson house to pick up Dustin, and he lets the kid pick the station to listen to. Their tastes are fairly similar, Dustin doesn't care and Steve likes anything he can hear the words to. He laughs a bit to himself at the thought, since he listens to opera every morning, and

it's notoriously difficult to understand a damn thing. Dustin gives him a look which Steve waves off and the boy takes this as his cue to talk his ear off about middle school gossip and what he learned yesterday in science.

It's not how Steve thought his senior year would go, but there's a swell of pride that the kid trusts him not to say something rude while he pours his heart out. But, he can't help being a dick sometimes.

"Henderson, Henderson, breathe man you still need Oxygen."

"Sorry, sorry. I'm just excited since Mom is sending me to a camp after the school year's done," Okay, that was news, would Dustin even survive going to a camp by himself? Who else would be there? How long would he be away? Nobody is seeing him act like a mom, so he asks his questions out loud, and Dustin rolls his eyes.

"Of course I'll survive, it's a science camp, nothing happens except learning cool shit-

"Language."

"And there's a bunch of kids going from all over. I'm only going to be gone for about a month," A month, an entire month surrounded by strangers learning nerd shit. Maybe it is a good idea, let him get a break after the nightmare that was October and November. Steve sure as hell needed one, but he planned on working over the summer, get some money to spend on fun things for once.

He drops Dustin off with a wave and parks at the high school. He gets out and goes to his locker to grab the books for Mrs. Click's class, then spends the rest of his time talking with Nancy and Jonathan about what they plan to do over summer. Nancy going to work for the Post is nothing strange, and it's not surprising Jonathan's hoping to join her as a photographer. It stings a little that they've got pretty solid plans that involve each other, he misses being that sure about things. The bell rings and he heads to History to suffer through tangent after tangent while he tries to wrap his head around what they're supposed to be learning. She's not a bad teacher, and he's got slightly higher marks in this class than others, so maybe it's not the worst. He's distracted by a snicker behind him and glances over to where Billy's sitting. He's . . . happy, no, amused, by the looks of it, which could mean trouble, so he turns back to his work and doodles little things in the margins of his notes while Click forgets what president they have. Her tangents actually give Steve the time to figure out what the assignments say, and he'll be eternally grateful.

After History is Typing, which is a class Steve, weirdly enjoys. He's memorized where the buttons are, and he doesn't need to think, his fingers just move where they're supposed to. He's debated asking if he can spend the class period transcribing everything, but he doesn't want to push his luck or his knowledge retention. He looks over at Nancy who smiles at him encouragingly. She knows about his reading problems, and his Click worthy tangents, so she's been supportive in the one class involving words he doesn't totally suck in. He's grateful for the support and uses it to keep himself out of the deeper parts of his mind. The parts where there are monsters or the parts that speak in a honey rich language taught and spoken out of love he's never quite sure. The inner turmoil about Italian chews him up, he's proud of who he is, his nonna and her bravery, his language, his heart. But in Hawkins, Italian gets you slurs from WWII and a strange look from everyone around you, no one here is supposed to know one of the hardest languages in the world. But he does. He has since he was small enough to be sung lullabies. He smiles at the memories, and realizes his hands are still on the keyboard, quickly picking up where he left off. He hums his favorite lullaby gently under his breath, he doesn't want to disturb the class, but he still wants to hear a voice

making the music.

The class ends with Steve feeling a bit invigorated, he did well in Typing even after remembering Nonna. It's when he gets to his usual table and his stomach rumbles that he remembers he didn't bring lunch. Again.

"How do you keep forgetting your lunches?" Jonathan asks as he pushes some of his over to him. Steve gratefully takes half the sandwich and the apple.

"Just move too quickly in the mornings, I forget to grab it."

"Forget to grab it? Or make it?" Damn, Nancy's got him there.

"Look, it's no big deal, I'll be getting my lunch money soon, and then I'll be eating normally," He avoids their eyes and focuses on eating his meager rations. He's the richest fuck in Hawkins and he needs to share lunch. Patetico. To be fair to himself, which he rarely is, he only has to share lunch at most two weeks before he gets his Food Check. He called them paychecks when he was younger and trying to seem mature. He wasn't wrong, but after realizing that it was a limited amount, the money quickly went to essentials. Then the kids came along, and he started taking what he could afford out of the checks to give Dustin a little extra arcade money.

He isn't a penny pincher, except for the fact he totally is. Has been since his turn to the Light Side. Money that's just given to him feels wrong, but until he can get a job and earn his own money, he's stuck with checks and a special occasions only credit card.

He looks up again once he's finished his food and he feels eyes on him. It's Tommy, and he looks pissed about something. A head count at the table could answer why, Billy wasn't there, and it's probably making Tommy feel anxious. Steve looks around the cafeteria and doesn't see the Californian, he figures he's probably outside smoking or jamming his tongue down some poor girl's throat. He winces at that thought, he's kissed after smoking and the taste isn't the best, but maybe he's just weird that way. It being Billy that tasted like nicotine, might change opinions on that though. The taste is still there, but his presence and -dare he admit it- ,the thrill of his exotic bad boy persona could sway someone to forgive the taste. Jesus how did he go from thinking of his grandmother, to his wallet, to fucking *Billy Hargrove* maybe kissing someone. Maybe while he's driving after lunch he can smoke to clear his head. The irony is not lost on him, but hey, he's not perfect, and it helps him remember the irony Nancy was talking about yesterday about Hamlet.

His eyes still scan for any sign of the blonde, and reasons that after yesterday maybe something happened. When he does come in, it's about 15 minutes late, and he's with a girl Steve never noticed before. They seem amiable, and when they find a table Billy glares until the occupants move. Billy's never been this open with the girls he goes after, but it would explain Tommy's anxiety, Billy's now in danger of "going soft". Steve looks away when he notices the pair shift into seemingly comfortable conversation, he's not a stalker after all. Then he hears a chuckle and turns back to them. That's the second time today he's heard Billy sound happy, and he wonders if it's real or not, if there's actually something going on between them. But it looks real, Billy's shoulders aren't tense, he's not putting on a show of how casual he is, Steve admits to himself that it kind of hurts. He notices the girl freeze at something Billy said, and his heart spikes at the sudden tension over there. He can't do anything, and he won't unless it seems like someone's going to get punched, so he watches. Billy seems unaffected, and the girl seems to relax soon enough, with Billy wiping his face with..a kerchief? It's not a normal napkin at any rate.

"Hey, Steve, Steve, you've been staring for a while," Nancy gently puts a hand on Steve's arm and brings his mind back to his own social life. She's looking at him in concern, which shifts to relief when he acknowledges them again.

"I'm fine Nancy, just got a bit lost in thought is all," He smiles at her and does his best to look like he's paying attention to whatever Nancy and Jonathan are talking about. That's a bit difficult with the sound of Billy laughing still on a loop in his head, but he just needs to keep up the charade until lunch is done.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Translations:

Fanculo questo, fanculo matematica = fuck this,  
fuck math

rallenta strega! Sto cercando di scrivere! = Slow  
down witch! I'm trying to write!

Patetico = pathetic

-Haven

## 2. Voglio mia nonna

### Summary for the Chapter:

Steve is having a rollercoaster of a day, but maybe there's a light that'll brighten it somewhat.

With the ring of the lunch bell came Steve's most carefree time of day. It's his free period, and since October and November that's meant spending his drives actively patrolling the town. The Demodogs and whatever didn't seem to like the light, but one can never be sure. It's stupid really, El closed the gate with Hopper and there was nothing to worry about. But that's what they thought last time, and god knows Steve doesn't want to be caught off guard again. It's probably nothing, it's been nothing for a month, but it calms the jitters. He ends up not smoking, instead rolling his window down and feeling the cold air mingle with his heaters. He's been thinking a lot today so he just cruises and let's his brain go blank.

As he drives he watches all sides he can see, mundanely, to check for pedestrians and subconsciously to check for flower faced nightmares. He turns the volume up and finally realized the station is set to rock music. The sudden screaming of the lead singer shocks his system.

"Cazzo di inferno!! I could have died!!" Steve swerves and pants, fumbling with the dials to just turn it off. "Who listens to this shit?! Gesù Cristo.." It takes a couple minutes of sitting in silence for him to get his head on enough to focus again. He's still shaken and he slowly drives back to the school humming his lullaby as a coping mechanism. By the time he gets back to school, the free period is over and Billy's Camaro is starting to leave. He's seen Billy leave early before, when he's tried to nap in his car, so he wonders if the other boy might have a free period now. He stretches and takes a deep breath, his last class is his favorite, Art.

Art was one of two classes he excelled in, the other being gym. He's always liked art, it was mindless in a sense, and the feeling of letting the brush or the pencil guide your movements was one of the best feelings in the world. He loves it, but it's not a profitable job according to his father. His father thinks in numbers, numbers of properties owned, number of employees, the numbers that rise higher and higher in his bank account.

*"Art is useless, Steven, until you are dead. Even then your chances at success are minimal. You need to work harder in your classes so you can make something of yourself, and if you refuse to follow my example, at least take up a sport so you aren't a complete failure!"* Those words had hurt a lot at the time, but in an act of rebellion, Steve didn't listen. Instead he saved up money to get quality supplies and made sure that he was always signed up for an art course. He knew that Nonna would be proud of him. She never really seemed to like her son-in-law, but she was polite enough that it never came across as harsh or rude.

Steve walked to class and noticed the short line of new students that had transferred over for the semester. The normal participants in the class were sitting in their usual seats, so it seemed like the new ones would just swap with ones that left. Steve sat down and a couple of minutes later Mr. Marryworth started announcing the seats. He zoned out until he heard his name be mentioned.

"Ms. Holloway, please sit next to Mr. Harrington," The girl in question quickly joined him, and thankfully didn't seem annoyed at the arrangement. Steve waited for Mr. Marryworth to turn his attention to other students before offering his hand.

"Steve Harrington, I hope we get along."

“Heather Holloway, it’s nice to meet you,” She smiled as she shook his hand and it strikes him how genuine it looks. He’s gotten used to people either trying to butter him up because of his family’s deep pockets, or hating him for that exact reason. He reflects her smile with one of his own and thinks that he might like this last half of the year. The assignment for the day is a pointillism piece of something they have on hand, and he notices Heather’s scrunchie.

“Mind if I draw your scrunchie?”

“Hm? Oh, sure! I don’t mind,” She starts looking for something to draw and Steve realises he might have made a mistake choosing something attached to a moving head. To fix both problems, he hands over his sunglasses.

“Here, since I’m drawing something of yours,” She smiles and takes them, perhaps not realising, or not caring that her wrist will hurt when class is done. Okay, maybe that was a dick move. She doesn’t say anything and starts to get to work, so maybe she’s got some determination in her. They work in silence for a while before Heather initiates the conversation.

“You’re on the basketball team.”

“Uh, yeah, why?”

“Wanted to make sure we had something in common, I’m going to be trying out for track once it’s available, and our practices would be at

the same time," She's still looking at her paper while she talks, and when Steve glances over, she's doing a good job.

"Guess I never thought about that, what are you wanting to do, specifically?"

"Pole vaulting," Surprise number three, or was it four now? He asks her questions about pole vaulting, and it releases the tension in his shoulders from earlier. He's enjoying talking to someone about something they enjoy doing, while actively doing something Steve loves. He tries to listen to everything as she explains how it works, so he can ask informed questions if she gets on the team. Heather's also enjoying the conversation, if the way her voice picks up both pitch and speed is anything to go by. He finds himself comparing her to Nonna and the way she always seemed to be happy and have something interesting to say, and it would always be something you wouldn't mind hearing about. Heather has the same way of speaking with her whole being, without necessarily moving a lot. Steve catches himself from slipping into Italian, despite the similarities, Heather wasn't Nonna and he doesn't know how she'd react to the language shift. There's a part of him that wants to try, reasons that she seems friendly enough, and might let him talk aimlessly about anything. The rational part of him reminds him that they've only just met, and even if she wouldn't mind, some of her friends might and . . he doesn't want to remember that feeling.

When class ends, Heather hands back his sunglasses and he preemptively wishes her luck at tryouts. He heads to practice and the only thing of note is Coach's temper at the team not being in perfect shape after a long break. Steve's all too happy when they're called to hit the showers and go home.

At home he's greeted by silence again and decides to try and pretend

Nonna is home.

"Ciao Nonna.... I'm home. I... I made a new friend," he tears up, emotions overflowing, and screams, "Happy now Mamma! I can't even be happy anymore! Ti odio! Nonna...why did you leave? Ho paura," Steve sinks to the ground and openly sobs at how far from Italian he's come. It's been too long since he's been able to openly speak Italian every day. He stays curled up in a ball of tears and anger for at least an hour or two, before he gets up off the living room floor and goes to make some food. Opening the fridge he remembers that he was supposed to go shopping, and he laughs cruelly at himself, "Patetico Stephano. Can't even remember one task. Stupido."

He slams the fridge door closed and stomps back to his car, not caring when he forgets to lock his house, or when he shuts the car door hard enough to shake the car before starting it. He ponders buying booze while he's out, but last year they raised the legal drinking age and he doesn't want to add another stressful thing to this afternoon. Switching his radio to play cassettes he puts in one of his Wham! ones, and relaxes with the familiar music.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Translations, although honestly, context speaks for itself:

Cazzo di inferno!! = fucking hell!!

Gesù Cristo = Jesus Christ

Ciao = hi (informal)

Ti Odio! = I hate you

Patetico = pathetic

Stupido = stupid

### **3. Incubi e sogni**

**Summary for the Chapter:**

TW: p\*nic att\*cks, mentions of v\*\*lence/d\*\*th

Steve's anxieties cause a panic attack while he's out shopping, and he calls Jonathan to take him home. They have a bonding moment while driving.

*"Watch Stephano, someday you will need to cook for someone you love."*

*"But what if I don't know how?"*

*"Then learn with them."*

...

*"Nonna, ho paura. il-il mostro m-mi man-angerà."*

*"Oh, mio bambino. Ascolta. ~Fai la ninna, fai la nanna, con'sto figlio non c'è più pace, fai la ninna, fai la nanna, pupo bello della mamma...~"*

...

*"Nonna, Nonna, look! I was bored at lunch so I started drawing, and it looks good!"*

*"Sì, sì. Very good Stephano. Someday you will be as good as Leonardo da Vinci!"*

*"You think so?"*

*"Naturalmente."*

...

*"Mom, where's Nonna?"*

*"Grandma decided she doesn't want to visit anymore."*

*"What?! That's impossible! You told her to stay away didn't you, she'd never leave me!"*

*"Steven, it's time you learn how to be responsible on your own."*

*"I'm a child! Who else will take care of me..."*

*"Daddy and I will visit okay? So be a big boy for me and stop fussing."*

...

*"Hello, Steven Harrington? I'm your new dance instructor, Antonio Garcia."*

*"It's nice to meet you."*

...

*"Mr. Garcia will not be continuing lessons with you."*

*"Why, is he okay, did something happen?"*

*"He's moved and it's much too far for him to drive here every week. Now you can focus on your schoolwork."*

*"Yes father, but will I get a new instructor soon."*

*"No Steven. These silly lessons cost too much and I won't pay for lackluster tutors."*

*"I... understand."*

...

*The air is stale, and the walls and floors are covered with vines, or tentacles, something alive. He's leading the children to The Hub to buy El more time. He pours the gasoline and lights it. They run, one of them trips and they can't pull him up in time, and have to keep running. They're lost and the Demodogs are close on their heels, they're at a dead end. One by one Steve watches as the kids he said he'd protect get mauled and eaten by the stuff of nightmares.*

*"Nancy was right Steve. It's all your fault," He turns, and there's Barb's ghost, hair and clothes moving like she's under water. "It's bullshit. You're bullshit!" Her face looks like Nancy's now, and she keeps repeating louder and louder "You're bullshit, you're bullshit!" Now more voices join in, first the kids, then Hopper, Joyce, and Jonathan. Billy's in front of him, smirking and his eyes full of anger.*

*"Finally met this King Steve everyone's told me so much about," And he laughs, soon joining in on the chorus of people Steve has failed, and adding his own insults. "Coward, failure, disgrace." It gets harder to tell if that voice is still Billy's, if it's his father's, or his own as he's mocked.*

*"Nonna, ho paura. Ho paura! I didn't mean to hurt them!"*

*"Woah!" Steven jumps as his car hits a bump in the road and he finds his way out of his head. He carefully reaches into the glove box and pulls out his pack of cigarettes. He's been cutting back, chasing after monsters and driving kids around town, but maybe today he needs one. His hands shake as he lights the cigarette and rolls down his window to let the smoke out. With the first inhale he can feel himself relax a little, he's a normal teen just driving to the store to pick up groceries, "I'll use the card, I'm not going to keep eating Jon's food. I*

can use the check to buy him something as a thank you.."

His eyes focus on the road ahead, and he's a few minutes away from the store. His hands are still shaking, but it's at a level acceptable for the chilled air. A dry chuckle escapes and he ponders how his life hasn't changed much -he still cares about public image- but instead of scoldings and threats to drive him it's the fear that every shadow could hide his death. Another, bigger twitch, he didn't check that the bat was in his trunk or back footwell when he left the house. The Gate could have opened again and he's unprepared, and what if the kids are in danger, what if they're dead-

"O-Okay Steph-en.. calmati.... calm down, the Gate is closed, and... e .. it's going to stay closed," Steve tries to pretend that he sounds more convincing, but there's a waver in his voice and he feels like a little kid again.

He pulls into the parking lot at the grocery store and stubs out the half used cigarette as he walks inside. He's able to remember what he needs to buy, and that's a blessing after a day like today. It's a bit harder to breathe, but he'll keep pretending it's because of the cigarette and ignore the edges of his vision becoming less clear. He manages to only drop two things, and neither broke while he peruses the isles.

"Hey Harrington," Oh god, not now, please let it just be in his head,  
"Hey, I'm talking to you!"

"Leave me alone Tommy, please..just...not today."

"Woah, what happened to you?" Tommy points to Steve's face and maybe, for a brief moment looks concerned. That moment passes quickly, and his usual smug look returns, "Crying like a little bitch." There's a bit less heat than usual, but maybe that's his imagination.

Steve raises a hand to his cheek and flinches feeling the wet flesh. He turns and walks faster, he needs to get out, he can't breathe. He needs Nonna, he can't breathe. *I can't breathe I can't breathe!*

He brings his hand to his chest, then his throat, and the world spins and fades away. He still feels it when his knees hit the ground before his head, and when somebody starts shaking him. They're talking, but he can't hear the words. He tries to move away from their touch, but they won't stop shaking him and it's too much. *It's too much.*

*Please go away stop hurt scared please home need please.* He's not sure if he's even speaking out loud, he's never dealt with this in public before. He tries humming, but his throat hurts and it probably comes out broken if at all.

*Please home need hurt protect please scared monsters nonna please help scared dark dark*

When he's finally able to see again and hear Tommy and someone else talking it feels like it's been forever.

"To... Tommy."

"Hey, Harrington, you with us? What happened man? You screamed

and freaked out."

"D-dunno.." He lies, and mentally counts the freckles on Tommy's face to ground himself. The other boy seems almost familiar, like they were friends again, but he pulls away with a frown.

"Call someone Steve, you're in no state to be driving like that....and don't worry about your things, I paid for them just before you came back to us."

"You... didn't h-have to." His eyes widen and he briefly entertains the idea that maybe he's still not awake. But none of his blackouts end in dreams, especially not nice ones. Is he dead, then?

Tommy shrugs and doesn't answer, turning and walking out the door waving behind him. Steve smiles slightly, a bit of his old friend, before the popularity, before they started giving a damn, showed itself. Maybe there was hope that they could go back to those days, if the world didn't destroy itself first. His smile drops, he wouldn't be able to share this monster shit with him, and he won't be able to be that same Steve from years ago. He knows too much, he's seen too much. Carefully, and slowly, he stands up and waits for his balance to settle before moving again.

He takes his cart, now full of bagged food, to the payphone and takes a deep breath before calling the Byers' house. He messes with the phone cord while the phone rings and he almost hangs up out of sheer nerves. Unfortunately, Jonathan picks up the phone before he can act on that thought.

"Hello? Byers house," Jonathan's voice comes through the line.

"Hey, It's Steve uh... I...need a ride. I'm at Bradley's, could you.." He scratches the back of his head as he tries, and fails, to sound casual. "I..something happened, so, yeah. I can pay you gas money."

"I can be there in 10 minutes, tops. Probably less," he can practically hear Jonathan nodding, a habit he and Nancy know Jon's had for years, "You don't have to do that, though. Pay for gas, I mean. I'm- I don't mind."

"Thanks, I do owe you though. See you when you get here," he's smiling, more relieved? happy? -what word fits his emotions right now? He's never been good with words- than he's been in the last hour or so.

"No need. Just wanna make sure you're ok. See you in a few. Stay safe," his usual- almost routine- goodbye punctuated by the familiar click and dial tone.

He places the phone back in the receiver and lets out a deep breath to hopefully calm his nerves more before slumping against the wall. There's a small amount of pride in having asked for help himself, but years of neglect quickly tamps that down. He wouldn't need the help if he was just.. normal. He watches the hands of his watch move as he waits, still feeling like he's not fully back to reality. It's shitty, not being 100% straight away, but he's learning that the blackouts aren't going away any time soon.

True to his word, Jonathan pulls into the parking lot roughly 8

minutes later. Steve pulls himself off the wall and waves before picking up his bags. He makes his way over and puts his bags in the trunk.

"Thanks again," Steve mentions when he opens the door to sit in the passenger seat. His hands fidget in his lap once he's seated, not as frightened as earlier, thankfully, "You sure you don't want a favor or something? I don't..want to take- that's not-" he's interrupted by Jon turning in his seat, not having started the car yet.

"Steve, you don't have to.. Pay me back or anything. I'm doing this cause you're my friend and I want to. I like helping my friends. But if it really means that much to you, you can pay me back by promising that you'll call if you ever need help, ok?" Jonathan isn't looking at his eyes, but he rarely- if ever- is, and Steve knows he's sincere.

"Okay, okay, I promise," he flushes a bit in embarrassment, and turns to hopefully hide it. All the Byerses seem to have the ability of looking into your soul, in a way that's kind or gentle. He still hasn't fully gotten used to it yet, and he wonders if he ever will. He focuses on fully relaxing, and letting out the tension, he knows Jon won't hurt him, he's safe. He allows a small smile when he feels he's accomplished that and turns to the other boy, "Your house or mine?"

"Well, considering you've got groceries, I figure we should at least stop by yours so those can get put away. Then, we can either hang there, part ways, or head to mine," Jonathan starts the car just the promise, so they're not far along the road to Loch Nora.

Steve thinks about it, it'll be less hassle to just stay home, but his house might not be the best after a breakdown, and the Byers' house is closer for when he'll need to get his car at some point. He hopes

that maybe Joyce will let him spend the night, then realizes he's got nothing prepared for that. Still, wearing the same clothes two days in a row is better than sleeping alone in his loveless house.

"Let's go to yours afterwards, it'll be easier to get my car again whenever your mom kicks me out that way," there's a lightness in his tone. He knows Joyce probably wouldn't force him out of the house, so it's jovial. He's wondered how she's put up with so much shit, and yet she rarely stops smiling. He almost wishes she was his mom sometimes. The part of him that's self deprecating reminds him that taking care of another kid full time would be Hell for her, even if he behaves.

Jonathan laughs a bit before adding, "Come on, we both know if she had her way, you'd be at our house forever," and he's right. Joyce Byers has the biggest heart on Earth, and cares a bit more about others than herself at times.

"I think I'd get annoying eventually, but I'd enjoy it while it lasted," any leftover stress and fear from the breakdown has dissipated by now, and Steve is enjoying the company of his friend.

"Honestly, I doubt it. We're kind of a weird bunch at the Byers house. I mean I took over breakfast duty after Mom nearly killed us on 3 separate occasions, Mom managed to intimidate the Chief, and Will has puppy eyes that could probably get Billy Hargrove to say yes to whatever his little heart desires."

That gets a burst of laughter, as Steve tries to imagine Will convincing Billy Hargrove to buy him ice cream or something. Once he's imagined it, he laughs more, and manages to get out through the fits of laughter, "I...oh god, I would pay good money to see that! Your

sweet brother getting Hargrove to bow to his whim would be hilarious," he stifles giggles in his fist, "And I hope that you'd have a camera to catch that moment on film."

At this point, Jonathan has joined him with short giggles. "Don't I always? I mean that's kinda my thing." Steve has to agree with that, and winces a bit at the memory of breaking a camera of his last year. Has he even apologized? He's meant to certainly, that was a dick move, but he can't remember if the words have ever gotten out. He decides that he should just say it while he's still thinking about it.

"Look I'm.. I'm sorry about last year. I didn't have an excuse, and it...it wouldn't matter if I did." His tremors have started up again, and he sticks his hands in the pockets of his jacket so they're less noticeable. He looks over to Jon without moving very much, and tries to gauge his reaction. He knows he at least won't be kicked out of the car until they reach his house, but if Jon was pissed enough, he could drive off, and Steve would have to walk back to his car early in order to drive to school.

"Thank you. Really. I mean, it sounds stupid, but it means a lot that you'd even think about apologizing. I don't get it a lot. And uhm.. For what it's worth, I'm sorry too. I uh I'm not sure how to explain it without sounding stupid, but I'm not great with social boundaries so I didn't realize that what I was doing was wrong. But- but I know now and uh I'm sorry.." Jonathan's hand shakes back and forth so his thumb taps against the steering wheel. Pulling his left hand from his pocket, Steve gently pats his shoulder and takes a moment to let the touch settle. He hopes it comes across as comforting as he intends it to.

"I forgive you," he smiles slightly and slowly removes his hand, placing it back in his pocket. He thinks better of it, and soon has both

hands visible on his lap. They're being honest right now, so hiding the tremors and twitching now seems a bit rude. However, doing so makes his leg start to bounce, and he lets out an amused huff.

"You bounce, too?"

"Oh, yeah. It's hard to keep still. Sometimes I bite my lips, or tap my pencil. Sometimes it's my leg, usually though, it's my hands," he holds one up for reference, "The only time I've noticed them be steady is when I'm drawing," putting his hand back down on his lap when he finishes talking.

"I'm kinda the same. You already know my legs bounce and shake and stuff pretty much constantly, but I try not to do it when I'm driving- for obvious reasons. That's when I tap my thumb. Other times I'll find myself chewing on whatever's closest or messing with my hair or shaking my hands. It helps me think, but the only time I don't need to do any of that is when I'm behind a camera," he's watching Jon as he's talking. It shouldn't really be surprising, but the similarities between them seem to feed into the bond of their friendship. The other boy understands him.

"We both become steady when creating our art, that's kind of cool honestly. My Nonna-" he takes a couple of deep breaths and counts things he sees through the windshield in his head. He doesn't think he'll blackout again, but better to be safe than sorry, "She uh..she used to say that I had a thunderstorm trapped inside me, and that's why I'm so full of energy. I think she'd.. she'd be happy I have a friend that's similar."

"I don't doubt that. Though, I don't know about you, but I haven't had energy since like middle school," Jonathan smiles something

light and almost.. Mischievous? Again. Bad at words.

"Oh, god no. Being a teenager just..." he has to think of words that don't sound wrong, "I dunno, takes it all out of you I guess," There, that's good, yeah.

"Y'know. I also heard fighting weird interdimensional monsters on a weirdly regular basis will do the same thing," he jokes, and earns some laughter in return.

"Really? Oh, no wonder we've all been zombies then!" He chuckles some more, and puts his arm to his forehead dramatically. He soon finds Jonathan chuckling with him, and it's a nice sound.

"Not to mention the one or two that actually came back from the dead," the laughter carries through his voice, and it sounds... right to be there, not jarring or weird.

"That's true! Hey..I just realized, I think this is the most I've ever heard you laugh," he smiles, as if he's won some prize, which he thinks he has to some degree, with Jon as private as he is, "I like it, your laugh," he blushes and contemplates the benefits of jumping out of a moving vehicle. Normal boys don't say that out loud, or do they? Is he making a big deal out of nothing? Honestly, probably, given his track record.

"Maybe this is the most you've been funny," Jonathan softens as his sort of tell of joking around, you learn these things when you practically grow up with someone, "Thanks..uh...yeah. Me too. Yours I mean. Your laugh, it's uh- it's nice."

Steve smiles and gently elbows him, "You don't need to compliment me back, but, I'll believe you. And also, I've been funny before no, then I was an ass, okay, you're probably right about that too," It's a nice feeling, and a perfect opposite to earlier drives today. They were full of stress and hurt, this one, this one is full of smiles and warmth. He could get used to this, he likes this feeling. It's safe.

"Told you so. Also uh.. I parked like five minutes ago, so..." more blushing as he gets out of the car and grabs his groceries to bring inside. How did he not notice? He haphazardly carries all his bags at once and fumbles a bit trying to get his keys out without putting the bags down. It's just as hard as it sounds.

Jonathan's voice sounds from behind him, "Do- do you need some help?"

"....yes..please," He bites the inside of his cheek as he goes over the rollercoaster of emotions he's had today; stress, fun, stress, blackout, fun, and getting flustered in front of his friend. His very *male* friend. He shakes his head and clears his throat, offering a couple of the bags. His friend takes the rest of the bags from one of his hands to free it from its food-related confines, and he digs the free hand into his pocket. Successfully pulling the key out moments later, he remembers he never actually locked the door. He puts the key away and opens the door, and in the absolute worst French accent he could make, with a smile says, "entrez s'il vous plait, Monsieur."

"You know, I have a friend in the school band who might actually kill you if she ever heard that," Jonathan smiles and shakes his head as he enters, anyway.

"Oh yeah?" He closes the door behind them, and toes off his shoes before turning right at the corner and into the kitchen. "Is she from France?"

Jonathan follows Steve's lead and replies from a few feet behind, "Not that I know of, but she could be with the way she speaks it. Course I've also heard her speak other gibberish that I don't understand so who's to say?"

Steve starts putting away the groceries and makes a hum of thought. Who in Hawkins would have taught her French? It's a bit of a bitch, and well..Hawkins. He does have to account for immigrants like his mom who don't look too "not White", and get away with it. And, he won't admit it out loud, but French seems sort of fitting, somehow, "Your band friend sounds..interesting. Not many people chomping at the bit to learn French around here."

"She only moved here in like her Freshman year. I'm surprised you haven't met. Aren't all the seniors at least a little buddy-buddy? It's kind of hard to not have at least met by this point, right?" He's taking items out of bags so Steve can put them in their places.

"I'm a social piranha, remember, got dethroned. Nobody other than Tommy and his group pay attention to me anymore. And I might have met her in passing, what's her name?" He gestures with a can of soup while talking, and bows slightly at his mention of his dethroning. He hides the sting of admitting out loud that he was tossed aside by Highschool Society so quickly.

"Ok first of all: Ow. What, are Nancy and I chopped liver? Second: I think you mean social *pariah*. And third: Her name is Robin. I forgot her last name like a week after we met and, at this point, I'm too

afraid to ask." Steve puts away the soup and elbows his friend.

"You're not- you know what I mean. And, okay, so Robin Question-mark. Hmm..doesn't ring any bells, but I probably have something with her." He shrugs, and pointedly avoids talking about his mangled phrase. It's not as bad as some times he's mixed up words, but it's still embarrassing when it happens.

"I mean, if you want, I guess I could introduce you. I got a thing I wanna ask her about from earlier today. One of those sort of brain itches that won't be satisfied without an answer, y'know?" By now, Jonathan is simply leaning against the counter, waiting patiently.

Steve stills a moment, before smiling and saying, "Sure, I'd like to meet this French speaking Robin. It sounds like a fun time." He finishes putting away his food, and thinks about the weird similarity they have in knowing a foreign language. He shakes his head slightly, recalling that she moved here recently, and not everywhere is backwards- like here. It might actually be nice, just to commiserate about that. He figures he'll try to get along, this Robin is a friend of Jon's so she's probably not bitchy or annoying.

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Translations:

Il mostro mi mangerà: the Monster will eat me

Mio bambino: my baby

Ascolta: listen

Fai la ninna...: Italian lullaby

Sì: yes

Naturalmente: naturally

Calmati: calm down

E: and

That was a long chapter, holy hell.

## 4. Steve, your Gay is showing

### Summary for the Chapter:

Steve gets a peak into Jonathan's personal life. The next morning, he meets this "Robin"

When they leave, Steve remembers -with some prompting from Jonathan- to lock his door. The drive is filled with happy bouncing from his end, and wiggling from Jonathan. For a moment, he's able to forget that they were never really that close before, it feels natural and good. He claps along when *Radio Ga Ga* comes on, and smiles at Jonathan's singing. Earlier he compared the younger boy's laughter to a prize. Now, *this* is the real prize, and it makes his own smile widen that much more.

They get to the Byers house and Steve's lead to and sat down on the couch. He tries to protest, but is quickly shut down. It's a bit of a shock that Jonathan is willing to share things with him, especially when he brings out the boombox. He's happy though, and smiling, he hasn't had someone put this much effort into him in ages. Not even Nancy paid that much attention.

Jonathan smiles at the reassurance his efforts are working and does a cute flappy hand thing, then blushes.

"Sorry, that's probably distracting."

"Don't apologise, I get it. I don't find it distracting, it was kinda cute honestly- uh.." well, he didn't mean to say that last part out loud, and now they're both blushing. Jonathan admits that he's been told negative things about it before, and even Nancy's done it too. He can relate, Nancy has slapped his hands when they've been "too active"

before. He scoots closer to Jonathan, hoping he'll recognize the sentiment of it.

When Jonathan mentions food, Steve does not manage to bite back the moan that seeps into his voice. Grilled cheese was a favorite of his as a kid, and while he has the stuff to make it, he hasn't had many "good days" to warrant the old tradition. The younger boy gets up and makes the food, and tells him to eat when he sets the plates and bowls down. He takes a bite of the grilled cheese and there's a familiar taste that brings another "happy food noise" and tears of happiness.

He mumbles, "Mio Dio," to himself before raising his voice to a normal volume for Jonathan to hear, "Can I hire you to be my personal chef? And please tell me I didn't imagine the garlic taste." he can barely hear the waver in his own voice as his emotions overflow. Jonathan giggles and confirms his suspicions, mock threatening him with a nail-bat if he reveals his secret. Steve agrees to keep the secret and sees Jonathan's smile drop when he turns around. He's confused until he realizes what his teary eyes must look like, and tells him that he's fine and they're good tears, because of Nonna -though he uses the term "grandmother", he slipped up earlier, he's not testing fate any more-.

They get to talking about the movie, *Pete's Dragon* , of which Steve's only seen one scene that gave him chills to think about. Apparently, that wasn't the worst of it, as the opening song is downright terrifying. Whoever the songwriter was must have been paid a lot to write that. He asks Jonathan if this is the right movie, even though he recognizes the Gogans. He's assured that there's lots of songs, and he's not alone in thinking *Happiest Home in these Hills* is disturbing. Steve takes this moment to cocoon himself in his heavy blanket and wiggles a bit like he did as a kid when watching movies.

They watch the movie, Jonathan humming along and laughing, and Steve occasionally asking questions or commenting about different things. When it gets to the part he remembers, he straightens up in emotional preparation. The words *proof of purchase* being used about a *child* will never stop upsetting him. He shivers, and Jonathan offers some much welcome support. His turn comes when the younger boy turns his face into his shoulder. He tilts his head over his, and manages to get an arm free of the blanket cocoon to wrap around Jonathan. There's a barely audible hum that follows, and he gently tightens his hold. *Steve, your Gay is showing. You know what, fuck it, I'm helping a friend and no one can judge me.*

The weight against him steadily grows heavier as the movie progresses, and when Steve's able to take a look, he notices Jonathan drifting further and further into sleep. When Joyce and Will get home, the sleepy boy slurs something about food before returning to dream land.

"Oh, hey Steve, I didn't see your car in the driveway," Joyce smiles when she walks farther into the house.

"Hi Mrs- Joyce. I uh.." he really didn't want to bring up what happened at the store, but he does need to get his car at some point. "My car's at Bradley's, can you help me up so I can get it?" He tries to carefully move so he doesn't wake up Jonathan, but Joyce simply lifts the younger boy up to let him out.

"He's dead to the world like this. Let me eat my dinner then I'll drive you to your car." She gives him a hug then goes to the kitchen to heat up the food. Within minutes her dishes are rinsed and in the sink, and she's grabbing her keys. They go out to her car and get in and out on the road, "So...why is your car at Bradley's?"

"I was in the store, shopping....Tommy approached me.... I blacked out"

"Tommy Hagan? You blacked out? Did he hit you?" Her usual happy demeanor drops and she goes into mama bear mode. She knows he's gotten into a fight within the last three months. He just hopes she hasn't noticed he still winces at bright lights, and that he loses balance more than usual.

"No, no! Nothing like that just....he said some things, and...I fell, hit my head, and I was..stuck for God knows how long." He hopes it doesn't sound like he's lying. Joyce sighs softly.

"Steve...how often does that happen?" She looks so hurt, like whatever this is it affects her physically. Steve looks away, feeling guilty for dumping this on her, but Joyce is a mom and won't let him ignore her help. He takes a couple of deep breaths before speaking again.

"You don't need to worry. This is the first time it's happened outside my house. Usually it's not that bad, I can handle it," *Whoops*.

"Steve," That was not the answer she wanted to hear, but after more silence she seems content to let it slide. She briefly looks at him, "Will can probably help you."

"But it's not...it wasn't like that."

"Maybe, but it sounds similar enough, and I don't want you to be alone until I know you're okay. So, you're going to stay the night at our house, and don't try to argue with me." Joyce points at him, only half jokingly, if that, and Steve resigns to spending the night, even though he hoped for this outcome earlier. He thinks about her suggestion, what happened to him didn't seem like what Will went through, from what he's been told. But Joyce was right, Will is the only person who could probably understand what that feels like. It would have been a blow to his pride a year ago, but now he's so involved with the kids' lives that it doesn't make him feel as weak.

The rest of the drive is silent, as is the drive back to the Byers house when he gets his car. He almost asked if he could grab his overnight bag from his place, but he worries he might be stretching Joyce's hospitality. That, and she might think he was trying to run away from her mothering gaze. He wouldn't though, he knows she's had a rough time with kids under her protection. And maybe, he's selfish and wants to feel the love of a mother that isn't hundreds of miles away drowning her sorrows in fancy wine.

When they get back, Will's already in bed and Jonathan....looks very uncomfortable. One of his legs is thrown over the back of the couch and thankfully that seems to be the worst of it. He goes to move the limb into a better position, but Joyce stops him, telling him that the ragdoll thing Jon is doing is normal, and gently ushers Steve towards Jonathan's bedroom. Once in the room, he takes a moment to look around. *In case anything moves, thanks paranoia.* He decides to sleep in his clothes, and crawls into bed and under the covers.

Jonathan's got two pillows, so he takes the extra one and holds it to his chest with his left arm. He curls around the pillow on his side, - right arm curled against his sternum, left leg bent, foot at slightly bent right knee- and takes a deep breath. Jonathan's unsurprisingly

got a sorta woodsy smell, and other stuff he can't describe. He really doesn't like when people say that smells or tastes are like "peace" or "home" or whatever, but he'll admit to himself that Jonathan smells like love and family. He falls asleep with a smile.

The next morning, the first thing Steve hears is a very loud **THUMP**. He jumps out of bed quickly, brain going through all the worst case scenarios before relaxing. It's daytime, those fucking flower faced nightmares don't like daytime. He walks down the hall to see what the thump really was, and sees a ruffled up Jonathan.

"I heard that thump down the hall, are you alright?" He messes with his own bed head, knowing it's going to stay that way until he can use the comb he has in his locker.

Jonathan says he's fine after a bit of prodding. When asked about breakfast, the younger boy brings up his plan before offering a change of clothes, which Steve gratefully accepts. He was thankful, his clothes were definitely wrinkled, or at least creased. He's led back to Jonathan's room and the younger boy rifles through his clothes, eventually finding something that should hopefully fit.

He changes into the offered clothes, grateful that the pants aren't Billy Hargrove levels of tight. How that man does it he'll never understand. The shirt and flannel are soft, -be that material or age, he's not sure- but he likes it. Steve goes out and eats breakfast with the family, *imagine that*, before Jonathan hands him a lunch and they leave for school in two vehicles. He decides not to listen to music this morning, instead enjoying the sound of the road.

When they get to school, he stops by his locker to try and tame his hair and grab his things when he hears a voice behind him.

"Hey, Harrington," déjà vous, damn.

"What do you want Tommy?"

"Glad to see you took my advice. Didn't expect you to go to the Creep though," ouch. It's kinda expected honestly, and he used to call Jonathan that too, but...ouch.

"He's my friend, lay off."

Tommy crowds him against the locker and gestures to what he's wearing, "His queerness rubbing off on you?" He has to hold his fists at his sides so he doesn't do something stupid.

"I didn't intend to spend the night, when I did I was offered clean clothes. You used to do the same thing when we were friends, remember? Now back off, I need to get to class," he manages to turn enough to check Tommy with his shoulder, and get him to back away. He looks around the hallway and sees Billy. He's feeling a bit prickly after that and throws out, "Enjoy the show?" before getting what he needs from his locker and walking away.

Thankfully, class goes smoothly and he's calmed down by the time Jonathan takes him to meet Robin at lunch. He wanders the halls until eventually spotting them and walks over. It doesn't take long for Jonathan to notice him.

"Hey, Steve. Glad you found us," he turns to Robin for a moment, "Robin, this is my friend, Steve. Steve, Robin."

Robin turns to Steve and nods, smiling with a wave, "Ciao, come va?"

*What the fuck. That's not normal.* He shakes his head slightly then responds, "Bene. Piacere di conoscerti," turning to Jonathan and switching back to English, "You said she knew French, not Italian."

"No. I said she spoke French 'and some other gibberish I don't understand' how was I supposed to know it was Italian? Also. You speak Italian?!"

"Fuck. Yeah..Mom's an immigrant and I picked up Italian from my Nonna. I sorta talked about her yesterday. The internal thunderstorm thing and the garlic stuff," well shit, he liked to think he was proud of his heritage, but really he's a coward. Realistically, Jonathan probably wouldn't tell anyone, but he didn't know Robin well enough to judge her character. His hands start shaking, and he kicks his foot slightly. This was not how he expected this to go at all.

Robin's eyes dart to Steve and it's not even a full second before she smiles. "Heritage learner. Nice. I learned it as my fourth a couple years back cause dad joked about me stealing all the love languages. I learned Spanish as a kid, when I lived in California, and French because my dad spoke it."

"First off, California? And second, why did your dad know French? Was it for work?"

"Yeah. I lived in Southern California till I moved here Freshman year. Not really sure about the French, but I never really asked. Took a French class to surprise him, though. Now, does that answer your twenty questions?"

"It was only three, but yeah it does," This Robin girl is full of surprises isn't she? She and Heather might get along 'cause of that. Jokingly, Steve turns to Jonathan and asks, "Do you have a secret language too?"

Jonathan shifts on his feet a bit before answering. "I mean.. It's not really a secret, but," he starts moving his hands around for some reason. "I know sign language, I mean." Steve has to think if he's ever noticed that, moving hands are usually noticeable. But, for the life of him he can't remember any specific instances.

"That's kinda cool, how come I never see you use it- wait, dumb question. I don't use mine much so- and I'm rambling," the last bit is said quieter, and he looks up at the ceiling to hide his embarrassment. It probably doesn't work, but he'll pretend it does. He clears his throat after a couple moments and brings his head back down, "I'm hungry, should we go eat lunch? You can join us if you like, Robin."

"I'll meet you guys there. Gotta say hi to someone real quick." And then she's off and dashing down the hall.

Steve turns to Jonathan again, "Shall we? Nancy's probably waiting for us too," he offers a smile, trying to ease the tension in both of them.

"Oh. Uh yeah." Jonathan sticks his hands in his pockets and starts down the hall in the same direction Robin just had.

Steve follows him and picks at the hem of his sleeve to stop the damn tremors. They're smaller than earlier, since Robin seemed alright, but he feels a bit guilty for putting Jonathan on the spot earlier.

"I only really use it when I'm practicing or feel like my voice is stuck," Jonathan says, quietly, once they're almost to the doors.

He nods and pauses for a moment, "Thank you, for trusting me with that.." he reaches over and gently squeezes the other boy's shoulder. He'll have to ask Dustin if he's seen any sign language books in the library, he wants to be prepared in case Jonathan feels like he can't speak while he's around.

"It's no big deal. Like I said, it's not really a secret. Even Nancy knows, but she hasn't really bothered to learn more than a few. I can't blame her. It's a lot of memorization and sometimes the imagery doesn't make a whole lot of sense." Jonathan huffs a small laugh through his nose.

"I meant about the reason, but can you give an example of some of the weird words?" Okay, so Nancy's still a bit bitchy with Jonathan. Must be like the hands thing- oh. Sign language is a hands thing. Weird connection.

Jonathan laughs a little at the request. "Uh maybe? Lemme think..

Oh!," he starts moving one of his hands in what looks like utter nonsense. Pinching his fingers together, tapping his ear, shaking his hand, and then planting it on his other hand in a weird cagey shape, "that's the sign for chicken nuggets." He laughs a bit more at this.

"Who the fuck has time for that?" He chuckles, then pitches his voice up a bit "Welcome to Jack in the Box, what would you like to order?" Then waves his hands purposefully all over the place and laughs more at his own joke.

"You're telling me. There's the whole alphabet and then all the actual signs for stuff and the grammar kinda reminds me of how Yoda speaks. Like 'I like french fries' would be," he puts his hand into an "ok" sign and bounces it side by side before pointing to himself and pulling his hand away from his chest in a weird way.

"Je-" he stops himself, and smiles a little nervously, "Gesù Cristo, that seems difficult," maybe his idea with the library would be harder than he thought.

"I mean some of them make sense like sitting or change or even clouds."

"Oh, thank god," by this point they've reached their normal table and Nancy is looking up at them with a weird look on her face.

"Hey, Nance," Jonathan takes his usual place by her side, "What's with the face?"

"I'm just surprised, I guess. I didn't know Steve knew about your sign language."

"I didn't until a couple of minutes ago, he showed me this really weird one for chicken nuggets," Steve sits down and starts eating the food Jonathan packed for him. When he's eaten some, he continues, "It was like.." he slowly goes through the motions Jonathan showed him earlier, however, he forgot what movement happened between the ear tapping and cage thing.

Jonathan steps in and does the sign correctly and Nancy gets another "look" on her face. "I don't remember you showing me that one."

"Steve asked to see some weird ones first," he shrugged.

"It was fun to watch, honestly," he replays the memory of Jonathan signing it, and adds circus music to it. This causes him to laugh and he thinks he won't be able to separate the two again. That'll certainly help with remembering that one at least, he's not sure about others. He clears his throat to stop the laughter and goes back to eating, eyes scanning the cafeteria for Robin. He finds her saying something to Billy and he suddenly realizes that *she's* the girl he saw sitting with him yesterday. *What the fuck?!*

### **Notes for the Chapter:**

Translations:

Mio dio: my God

Ciao, come va: Hi, how are you

Bene. Piacere di conoscerti: good, nice to meet you

Gesù Cristo: Jesus Christ